

Food: The Tselemente redux

TUCKED away from the bustle of shoppers is the enchanted jasmine-laced garden of Athens' newest restaurant, Christina Handmade by Tselemente - a mouthful of a name but one that speaks volumes to Greeks of all generations.

Owner Christina Kyriakidi opened the restaurant just six weeks ago with the intention of replicating "dining in a 1960s house in Kifisia". To create this old-world charm, Kyriakidi raided her grandmother's dowry for all the beautiful traditional elements that make up a Greek home: the linens, porcelain and vases full of wild flowers.

Lending his legendary name to the restaurant, chef Yiorgos Tselemente is crucial to the success of the restaurant. The grandson of Greece's renowned cookbook writer Nikolaos Tselemente has a highly esteemed apron to fill. Indeed, so huge was the impact of the elder Tselemente's compendium of cuisine that "Tselemente" would become synonymous with the Greek word for cookbook.

With that kind of high profile, the name has predictably been both a curse and a blessing for the younger Tselemente, who has been in the restaurant business for two decades.

"The name is both good and bad," Tselemente says with a laugh. "It all depends on how each person reads it, whether they have a good perception of Tselemente, the cookbook, or not."

Huge impact

The history of Nikolaos Tselemente and the effect he has had on Greek cuisine in the 20th century has been profound.

Born in 1878 on the island of Sifnos, he grew up in Athens, where he became involved in his father's restaurant. A year studying the culinary arts in Vienna was the catalyst for his position as one of the most prominent and well-respected chefs in Greeks' history. In 1932 he established a cooking school in Athens and first published his now famous cookbook.

Purists claim that Tselemente had a destructive impact on Greek cuisine

by the perceived gentrification of the inherently Arabic cuisine, which was considered 'peasant' food by the upwardly-mobile classes.

With the success of his cookbook, Tselemente incorporated bechamel and other French sauces into the Greek kitchen to create the dishes that are today recognised internationally, including mousaka and pastitsio.

"Yes, he did love French cooking and was highly influenced by it, but his aim was to make improvements on the cuisine of the time, using tradition as a foundation for change," says Yiorgos Tselemente, defending the role of his grandfather.

"He incorporated sauces like bechamel to improve the dishes, not to transform Greek cuisine into French. Of course, people wanted these developments and that is why dishes like mousaka have remained [almost] 100 years later."

Tradition with a twist

Putting aside the controversial role of the Tselemente cookbook on the development of Greek culinary identity, the menu at Christina Handmade by Tselemente is traditional with a few ex-

citing entries, such as briam, a baked vegetable dish rarely seen on menus.

"We have taken recipes from the original cookbook and adjusted them for the modern palate," Tselemente says. "Today, in particular, we cook with much less oil than was used in our grandparents' day. Even though they are lighter, the flavours transport you to the '60s, keeping in line with the restaurant concept."

The seasonal menu is small with several daily specials, all taken from the original Tselemente cookbook. The keftedakia, or fried meatballs, are a homage to minced meat.

Unfortunately, too often restaurants serve the "frozen fish finger" version of keftedakia. Fresh mint, quality minced beef, fried in the highest grade olive oil makes the difference to this dish, lifting it from mediocrity to star quality.

The smyrneika soutsoukakia is another dish that takes humble mince to new heights. The creative melitzanes me boukies kokkinisto is a wonderful twist on the classic papoutsakia, or stuffed eggplants.

Ending the delicious 1960s meal with the classic creme caramel is bewitching by its very French Greekness. A meal to make Nikolaos Tselemente proud.

Article from Athens News

21. The rusting remains of the mining facilities, now long closed, create an eerie feeling in the southeastern bay of Megalo Livadi, one of the island's many enchanting locations. Along with the ruined workers' houses and the neoclassical building that housed the offices of the mining company, they contrast with the few palm trees and the area's fine beaches. In fact, the "Metalleia" mines are one special reason for fans of exploration and photography to visit – but then again, this holds true for the entire island.

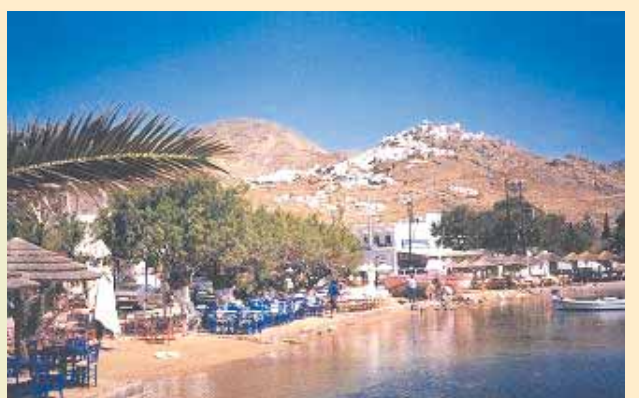
At first sight, Serifos's landscape is one of the most beautiful in the Cyclades, and this is probably what Elytis had in mind: the daunting massif with its steep slope dotted with whitewashed houses above the picturesque tree-lined bay at the port. In contrast to most other Cycladic islands, where jacuzzis mark ho-

tel verandas and 4x4s plow even the outlying roads, Serifos has curiously managed to retain its authentic charm, low-key profile and laid-back ambience.

You will not find hip bars, fusion cuisines, jetskis and fancy sunbeds here. The food in the little tavernas has a homemade quality and the golden sand or colorful pebbles on most of the 72 beaches of all sizes bear few, if any, footprints – just as in the old days.

Avlomonas, near the port of Livadi, is the only beach with sunbeds. Livadakia, Ganema, Psili Ammos (highly rated by The Sunday Times), Aghios Sostis and Sykamia are also excellent, well shaded and popular.

But as Serifos is sparsely populated (1,400), the infrastructure is not well developed and getting to most other beaches requires foot power. In fact, this



is half the beauty of a trip to Serifos – discovering its beaches reached via footpaths.

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